

Remarks of Hugh D. Birdsall
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
concerning the proposed changes to certification in Special Education

Thursday, April 29, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Hugh Birdsall, and I'm an ESOL teacher employed by LEARN.

While I assume a positive intention behind the new special education certification requirements, I question the wisdom of creating requirements that will in the short term decrease the pool of qualified applicants for these teaching and mentoring positions, and in the long term dilute the quality of services available to students with individual education programs.

As a teacher of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) who sometimes cross-services students with special education teachers, and who strives to prevent both the over and under identification of English Language Learners as special education students, the new certification requirements make little sense to me. My concern is that even a short-term shortage of special education teachers in my district would adversely impact all of my efforts to serve my

particular constituency. Will I be forced to address not only the language learning needs but also the special education needs of my students to take up the slack left by a special education teacher shortage? I also worry that special education specialists with inadequate training (for example, not even having had student teaching experience) will not be able to navigate effectively the complexities and ambiguities of identifying the appropriate needs of English Language Learners in their districts or offering classroom teachers the kind of support and guidance they have come to rely on from specialists in the field of special education.

Thank you for considering these concerns. I hope that you will accept guidance from the field and from the CEA as you find ways to revise these certification requirements, making them more compatible with district realities. Maintaining two distinct levels of Special Education certification would, I believe, address both of my concerns.